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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Extension Service
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Questions and Problems, California

Regarding a list of questions and problems that might be discussed. It is assumed that this refers to matters of educational methods only and not to the subject matter of public and agricultural policy. The latter, of course, is almost limitless. As to educational methods that might be used by Extension in the field of public policy, it appears to be primarily a question as to "where is our field of responsibility and how can we discharge that responsibility efficiently and without bias." At the meeting of the Association of Land Grant Colleges and Universities held in Washington, D. C., November 10-12, 1947, Noble Clark speaking about "Opportunities and Responsibilities of Land Grant Institutions as Regards Issues of Agricultural Policy" states, "Issues of public policy should not be left entirely to pressure group politics.....That (farmers) want unbiased information which has been analyzed and summarized by competent persons who have prestige as scholars and scientists. We (the Land Grant Colleges) have the legal authority which is needed to carry out this responsibility." Now what can we do about the responsibility. Clark states we must "realize that Agricultural Extension is primarily an educational activity and not just an action program." That seems very important. Anything as tender and fragile as educational extension work in agricultural and public policies can not be handled satisfactorily in the vehicle of an action program.

As to what is our responsibility in this field, Director H. R. Wellman of the Giannini Foundation at the same meeting speaking on the same subject with respect to research states, "The business of the research worker in agricultural policy is to determine the nature and magnitude of the benefits and burdens accompanying particular programs adopted or proposed. It is not his prerogative to decide whether government should intervene in the economic affairs of agriculture or what form the intervention should take."

Land Grant institutions have hesitated to enter this field simply because "the pertinent facts and relationships in this complex field are not self evident, but must be discovered." (H. R. Wellman) Further, "It takes more skill to discuss these controversial issues before a general audience than merely telling farmers which spray formula to use in combating a particular disease." (Noble Clark)

Educational work that has been done on public policy problems in California.
Answer: (a) In answer to what was done--(i) The Land Grant College Committee report on postwar agricultural policy was widely distributed by all county agents. A number of them discussed the salient features of that report with farm groups. The follow-ups of that report were handled in like manner. (ii) The report, "Suggested Agricultural Policies for California," by the California State Board of Agriculture et al. was likewise distributed in large volumes by county agents to practically all agricultural leaders in their counties. This report is (now two years old) still being picked up by farmers visiting county agent offices. Questions and answers to stimulate discussion on these problems were prepared for the Farm Bureaus. (iii) The Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin, "Booms, Depressions, and the Farmer," was likewise made available to most agricultural leaders and farmers. (iv) Considerable material was prepared or secured by specialists for the information and use of the county agents. Generally speaking, practically all phases of agricultural policy problems are included in the above.

(b) How were they handled? Were rural leaders trained; county agents trained; public meetings held; etc.? Answer: Many meetings have been held by the specialists to discuss public policy programs with small groups of county agents. These include the E.C.A. program, foreign trade agreements, price supports, the Brannan program, etc. Meetings with civic and farm groups likewise have been attended by specialists and agents. However, in practically all cases these subjects have only been discussed with the public, the farm organizations, and others at their invitation. No campaign or program of spread of influence through leader training has been done in an attempt to sell a program. Discussing these subjects on invitation, of course, presents a much more receptive audience. Many public and agricultural policies are, however, presented by agents and specialists through various media in connection with or as part of other subject matter.

(c) When was it done? Provide in this section a statement of timing and sequence of follow up.

Specialists attempt to keep all Extension personnel informed on current problems. Agents in turn have used that information in their counties to the best of their judgment. The Land Grant College report on "Postwar Agricultural Policy" was, as mentioned above, widely disseminated and discussed in the winter of 1944-45. The report of the California State Board of Agriculture et al. on "Suggested Agricultural Policies for California" was an attempt to activate the Land Grant report on the state level. This was disseminated in 1947-48.

(d & e) These are covered in the above.

(f) A critical appraisal of your experiences.

The very fine report on "Suggested Agricultural Policies for California," which is the state adaptation of the Land Grant College "Postwar Agricultural Policy" report, did not obtain the degree of interest contemplated for it in the foreword. In an attempt to activate discussion among Farm Bureau centers, "Questions and Answers" were prepared to stimulate discussion. It must be admitted, however, that neither Farm Bureaus nor county agents have been able to obtain interest in these matters unless they are of immediate interest. They appear too academic for farm group discussion, unless there is some immediate personal interest involved. For example, the determination of parity was something no one bothered much about until price ceilings and floors were tied to parity. Compensatory payments in the "abstract" land-grant report did not create nearly as much interest as they did in the Brannan proposal. This observation on human reaction is not limited to public and agricultural policies, but to most everything else. Attention is aroused in groups only in the degree that personal interests are affected.

Obviously the dissemination of all information on such highly involved and controversial subjects as some public and agricultural policies can not be expected to be done through county agents who are themselves fully occupied in the dissemination of cultural information, in which fields they are trained. A second point is that the "passing on" of information even though relatively simple can not be passed on undamaged unless the person passing it on is thoroughly familiar with it. Years ago the specialists in California prepared some 20 economic lessons--simple in content and covering, if possible, only one phase of economic activity--to be used by county agents for presentation to local groups. The results in some cases were satisfactory; in other cases results were not good for various reasons--lack of preparation in some cases, in other cases an impossibility for persons to convey other person's thoughts unless they can assimilate them and rearrange them in their own order of thinking.